2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

logy is ever likely to arise, I will not venture to discuss. The point is that Nupe theology is more ambitious; the Nupe do speculate further, and reckon with a great many additional (or 'supererogatory') existences and influences. They seem to feel the need to do justice to the particular features of the world by means of particular conceptions, over and above its broad justification in terms of divine creation.

This proliferation of thought is, of course, not peculiar to Nupe religion, though we may note that the Nupe ignore many 'particular' features which other religions feel compelled to acknowledge and elaborate. Thus the Nupe find nothing to explain about the heavenly bodies, do not concern themselves specifically with lightning, thunder, or rain, and speculate only vaguely about animals or natural features. Instead, their attention is focussed upon health and disease, birth and death, fertility, misfortunes, dreams, that is, upon things human. The Nupe elaboration of the universe, we might say, is anthropocentric.

Yet it concentrates on natural man, not on the moral being. Again it neglects all features which might serve this kind of conception, such as an after-life promising reward or retribution, or natural catastrophies that might signify divine anger or warning. Even where the ethical interpretation suggests itself forcibly it is ignored; thus the metamorphosis of the soul stands apart from any ethical design; the powers of good and evil spirits descend on man at random, and the success or failure of supernatural appeals, to ancestors or even to God, do not reflect upon the moral worthiness of the suppliants. There are a few vague notions of divine retribution. Thus it is admitted, but never spontaneously vouchsafed, that incest is punished by barrenness and blindness, and that persons guilty of concealed crimes may be punished by the *kuti* (in an unspecified manner) or killed by lightning (in the case of theft). But these half-hearted concessions do not alter the picture of a creation devoid of moral purpose.

Are, then, all the 'additional influences' which the Nupe read into creation and all their 'further speculations' merely attemps to 'do justice to the particular things in the world', and no more? It may well seem so. There seems to be no other, ulterior, motive behind the readiness to ascribe the contrariness of a tree or the uncanniness of a locality to spirits rather than to nature just-so created; behind the belief that certain ailments betray the machinations of spirits or witches over and above the weakening of the *anima*, and perhaps natural causes; or behind the subdivision of mental afflictions, which are traced to spirits, to the vagaries of the body, and to God. But consider also that these diverse explanations are not kept apart, by some economical parcelling-out of the universe;

8: Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

8. Then, there are two figures which in appearance seem to be cast out of pure copper. One is 1 foot 10 inches high, and represents a man standing with clasped hands. A small pigtail adorns the head, the eyes are very bulging, and the feet very big. The other (Plate M 6) is a remarkably realistic bit of modelling, and is as noticeable for this quality as No. 4 is for its formal decorative treatment.

9. There remains one small figure (Plate M 7, 8), 1 foot 4 inches high, apparently of pure brass. It is of a male figure of ungainly proportions and coarse features, holding a crook and wearing an apron. In addition, a small cotton cloth is tied round its loins.

10. No. 4 is very heavy, due probably to the fact that the clay core is still within the figure. The others are light and hollow. All are or have at one time been on shallow rectangular bases.

11. The first thing that strikes one about the figures as a whole is the difference in the material of which they are cast. All of them appear to be made by the *cire perdue* process. But, as has been indicated above, four are of dark bronze, two appear to be of pure copper, and one of brass. Only the three last-named are kept scoured. Another striking feature is the divergence of technique. It is impossible to think that there are less than three sources for these figures, not because of the difference in metal used but on account of the wide difference in treatment—unless, of course, they are copies of originals. However this may be, the designs on Plate M 2, 3, 4 are so distinctive and conventionalized that they must have had antecedents, and it is to be hoped that this article may have given sufficient data by which their origin can be traced.

12. The Village Head of Tada tells the following legend. The Chief of Atagara had a son called Shode who was a successful hunter but could not find a market for his meat. At that time the chief of a certain town called Wanta had a girl in his household whom he gave to Shode to cook the meat of the animals he killed. After a time she became with child by Shode. When he was about to return to his home, he brought her a charm and a loin cloth and told her to give them to her son when he was born, for a son it would be. Shortly after he had returned home, his father, the chief of Atagara, died and he succeeded to the chiefdom. Now, in those times when a new chief was installed, each town brought slaves, and it happened that this child Edegi, which the girl bore to Shode, was amongst them on this occasion. When the chief, Shode, saw Edegi, he recognized him by the charm and loin cloth, promoted him to honour and showed him much affection. Shortly before his death he called Edegi and told him that after his death he should gather all his property together and leave the country. At this the townspeople rose up in jealousy, but Edegi escaped and travelled up the Niger with his loaded canoes till he came to the neighbourhood of Bida. There he abandoned chains because of their weight and passed on to Tafa in Bida territory, then to Tada, Gbere and Jebba, at each of which places he left either chains or ornamental figures. He got as far as Kwatashi in Bussa, and then returned or was driven back. His boat and poles were of bronze. They lie in the Ega river close to Muregi. Edegi sank himself and the boat because he could not elude his enemies. He was the first chief of the Nupé.[1]

13. The information given in this account suggested further inquiry at Gbere, 15 miles east of Jebba, opposite Rába, the only one of the above-mentioned places that is situated in Ilorin Province. Owing to the phenomenal floods it was not possible to reach the village itself, but the chains were brought to Tada for inspection. There are five of them, measuring 33 feet 6 inches, 20 feet, 23 feet, 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 2 inches respectively, and all are much corroded. The links vary from 3 inches to 6 inches in length and are rectangular in shape. At the end of one chain is a circular link. The weight of all the chains is about 20 lbs.

14. The Ndeji and the Wangwa of Gbere say that the chains were used in pre-British days for strangling criminals. Executions were carried out in the bush by the Checho assisted by three youths. The present Checho who looks after the chains has not seen an execution, but the Ndeji

[1] *Note.*—According to the Busa legend, Edegi was chief of Gbere. He came up the river as far as Kwatashi, and encamped on the east bank of the Niger. Sarkin Wawa sent to warn him that he was not destined to become ruler of this region and if he stayed death would be his portion. It was then low water, and Edegi walked out to a large rock to receive the Wawa envoys.

When he heard their message he laid a curse upon the rock that any canoe that came near it would sink and any man that touched it would die. Edegi then departed down stream, but the rock remains and is still called Dutsin Edegi.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.[2]

II.

The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *'ti dzana*, the 'head of Dzana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Dzana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'[3] The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leiši ηyá 'tsu*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (*e.g.*, of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lèse majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *ndáce*, the 'father of the shooting,' *i.e.*, the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

Whether such beliefs went deeper than this: whether there existed a general superstition which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[2] A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technic as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technic which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also Max, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

[3] The *ledu* are also known by the name *dogari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dogari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *tete-cigbeci*, lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

631 693 weapon so well suited to their hands. And in their small 'state within the state' this jurisdiction over the 'King's Highway.' was still working, a true if smaller copy of the old system, some thirty or forty years ago.

IV.

681 693 642 The *ledu* villages are, as we have seen, linked with the king's person by special sacred links; they are made to share the king's guardianship over the law; they thus visibly represent, and almost propagate, the supreme power of the king at what we are tempted to call 'strategic' places. And in this, it seems to me, an important general sociological issue is involved. Strict centralization of legal power, however strong a machinery for political integration it seems, always harbours a disintegrative element as well. For it tends to separate the crime as actually committed from the final act of justice. The element of retaliation and atonement, so essential to the savage mind, becomes meaningless where the criminal is tried and punished a hundred miles away, and by people who are, practically, strangers. The individual community is deprived of one of the most powerful elements of social cohesion, namely, the title to sanction the violation of its laws and of its social order within its own boundaries. It appears to be the meaning of the *ledu* organization to neutralize this influence for that vital area of the Niger valley. For the most conspicuous, final, phase of jurisdiction is returned to a certain extent to the individual community. It is true this applies only to a few selected places. But we remember their surprising regular distribution on the river; and also the rule that the *ledu* village nearest to the place of the crime had to be called upon to perform the execution. These villages are 'representative' places, and 'strategic' places, and their selection is backed by the strongest charter: mythical and religious belief.

S. F. NADEL.

[P. 132]